

Report On the Radical Hits project, **31st Oct -5th Nov 2005**

(part of the Why Do You Practice On The Outside? theatre festival)

What happened?

In their long term planning Desperate Men had wanted to do a project, Radical Hits, that would create a performance event in collaboration with local artists from outside the company. Although funding for this project was not forthcoming they retained it as an aim. When Theatre Bristol invited Leo Bassi to Bristol. It was proposed that he lead a project such as this for five days. Theatre Bristol paid LB's fee and the participants were asked to donate £50 each to help with production costs as well as their time. Participants were selected both on their experience and their local involvement. Many had not participated in a workshop for many years and some were initially uncertain whether to join the group. Prior to arriving in Bristol LB was sent the schedule for his ten day visit and was informed that he would be working with experienced professionals in the Radical Hits section and that this period was to lead up to some kind of event/performance on the final day (Friday). Due to his heavy work schedule he was unavailable for discussion before arriving. LB's first four days in Bristol were spent teaching two different workshops at Circomedia. He began the Radical Hits project in the same way as these, using the first day to outline his background and approach as well as using improvisation exercises. He also proposed his idea of inviting Walter Wolfgang to Bristol to celebrate his provocation at the recent Labour Party conference. By the second day Mr Wolfgang had been invited and he had informed LB that he would not be available to come until the Saturday. Much of this day was spent going round the group eliciting motivations and expectations. By the third day there was much frustration and restlessness in the group especially after LB had announced he did not intend to make a theatrical performance. On Thursday morning LB cancelled the workshop, offering not to be paid for the time he had already spent and offering participants their money back. He declared his intention of continuing with his proposal with whoever wanted to work on it. About half the group did so, to a greater or lesser extent. For many the decision of whether to continue with the project was affected by the need to move the event to the day after it had been foreseen.

What was the feedback?

Three days after the final event an evaluation meeting was held with six participants, emails were received by another four.

There was general agreement that there had been many positive aspects to the project. These included the following.

- 1) Working with such a high standard of fellow artists who had never worked together before. A sense of camaraderie was created by the difficulties.
- 2) That the group had been provoked into heated debate on subjects that would not normally be discussed (such as the relationship between politics and street theatre).
- 3) Those that participated in the final event enjoyed participating in it and seeing the effect it had on Mr Wolfgang, on the public and on the non-artistic political participants.
- 4) That the event was enjoyably different because it was 'real' rather than the product of imagination
- 5) That people had learned a lot, much of it 'by default' rather than through the teaching – this included learning about 'the mechanics of power' – how the process had been manipulated

- 6) There was some agreement with LB's assertion that the group were out of touch with the media and how effectively it could be used
- 7) That there had been a connecting of art and politics; although this was not new to the group, it was vividly demonstrated especially when the 'political' event joined up with the 'artistic' conference
- 8) That the groups dependency on funders and festival programmers had been challenged
- 9) Some felt they felt 'confirmed' in their way of working because of having it challenged
- 10) A good foundation had been laid for future projects with similar participants
- 11) Those who usually lead stepped aside and others took leadership responsibilities

However most of the group felt disappointed with project, two were quite angry. Reasons included the following.

- 1) LB had decided his agenda before consulting with the group.
- 2) His agenda did not have roles for 16 performers, the talents of the group were not used
- 3) Participants were expected to fill administrative functions which is the last thing they would expect to pay to do
- 4) Not enough pre-project communication. LB did not have enough time off.
- 5) Some participants felt their ideas had been snubbed and very little attempt was made to learn names.
- 6) That the early exercises were about how performers come across to an audience but there was no connection between this work and the work needed for the proposed event
- 7) Too much listening to LB and not enough being listened to
- 8) Participants were being asked to do what they felt to be impossible. e.g. motivating and mobilising large numbers of people

Conclusions

- 1) The group had different expectations of the project from LB.
- 2) LB is not familiar with the British way of thinking and working
- 3) LB is more used to teaching younger participants who are more able and available to fill roles necessary for a campaign squad
- 4) Teaching styles in Spain & Italy are different to those in Britain (In Spain many hours of talking are quite normal)
- 5) More consultation is needed beforehand. LB needed a day off before the Radical Hits days.
- 6) Participants did not 'block' proposals but did not feel engaged in the subject or the activities
- 7) LB could not identify any subject that the group could all feel passionate about
- 8) Britain does not have the kind of oppositional activism or the networks that exist in Spain
- 9) A group has been brought together that looks forward to further projects

Other points

- 1) The initial idea for Radical Hits was to put an event together very quickly. This seemed to be in accord with LB's method of Rapid Response to current events. Too much advance planning would define and narrow the possibilities. However the unpredictability of leaving things to the last minute means an element of risk.

Bim Mason

24th Nov 05